

Integrated training to launch at 5 sites this year

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Fiscal 2014 is a critical year for the Integrated Training Environment. The combination of live, virtual and constructive training will launch at five locations in fiscal 2014, bringing the total to nine sites up and running.

The system, which Army leaders call the backbone of the Army Training Concept, provides a common operating picture on mission command systems. Simply put, the Army plugs in near-term threat scenarios, then places commanders at multiple echelons in a collective training battlefield.

With ITE, a commander in one day can work through assembly resident area procedures, move into contact and run through a series of missions. And this is done

without the time-consuming and costly deployment of large units to training centers.

The live element is brought into the mix through the Homestation Instrumentation Training System, which tracks live soldiers and vehicles. It simulates weapons effects and engagements and sends exercise information to the Mission Command Systems that are also receiving information from the virtual and constructive simulations and simulators.

The virtual input comes from one of two simulators. The Close Combat Tactical Trainer is used by heavy brigade combat team crews, while the Aviation Combined Arms Tactical Trainer is used by helicopter crews to sharpen individual and collective tasks such as mission command and gunnery

skills. New software allows the trainers to operate together in support of air-ground coordination training.

The third piece is constructive training. This uses simulated people and equipment that operate in a simulated environment that includes friendly and opposing forces, tribal groups and terrain features. This provides the multiple scenarios and countless repetitions needed to hone mission command and decision-making skills.

Combined-arms maneuvers have been a priority in recent ITE training, according to Gen. Robert Cone, commander of Training and Doctrine Command.

"This is the most tactically competent generation of war fighters we've had in decades," Cone said.

"But... their experience has largely been a [counterinsurgency] environment, and there are other environments that we are likely to be involved in."

The ITE system went online at four locations in fiscal 2013: Fort Hood, Texas; Fort Bliss, Texas; Fort Campbell, Ky.; and Fort Drum, N.Y.

The current schedule is:

■ Fort Stewart, Ga. (first quarter, fiscal 2014)

■ Fort Riley, Kan. (second quarter, fiscal 2014)

■ South Korea (second quarter, fiscal 2014)

■ Fort Carson, Colo. (third quarter, fiscal 2014)

■ Schofield Barracks, Hawaii (fourth quarter, fiscal 2014)

■ Fort Bragg, N.C. (second quarter, fiscal 2015)

■ Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash. (third quarter, fiscal 2015)

■ U.S. Army Europe (fourth quarter, fiscal 2015)

■ U.S. Army Pacific (second quarter, fiscal 2016)

■ Fort Knox, Ky. (third quarter, fiscal 2016)

■ Fort Polk, La. (fourth quarter, fiscal 2016)

■ Maneuver Center of Excellence (second quarter, fiscal 2017)

■ National Training Center (third quarter, fiscal 2017)

■ Army National Guard (fourth quarter, fiscal 2017)

There are still bugs to work out, Cone said. He is pressing for a full-time, resident ability that is as user-friendly as possible. And there is good reason for his demands.

The combination of live, virtual and constructive training is needed now more than ever. Two

See **TRAINING** next page

Training

From previous page

brigades were combat-ready at the start of fiscal 2014. Units headed to Afghanistan are qualified for the train-and-advise mission, not combat. And a rebalance is not expected before 2019.

In the meantime, the Army looks to have seven trained and equipped brigades by June 2014 — two infantry, two Stryker and two armored BCTs, as well as an aviation task force. While the ITE model will be used for those units, it also will help mitigate the tiered readiness expected over the next five years, especially for armored BCTs because they cost more to train.

"People don't really understand readiness," Cone said. "[They ask], what are they complaining about? They got the equipment. They got the people. So they must be ready to go. Well, let's take a football analogy. If you have the equipment and the people, are you ready to start the regular season in the National Football League? No. There's a matter of individual competencies. I mean blocking, tackling, passing, catching, etc. But that's not

enough, either. You can't just have a bunch of individuals and put them on the field — what you literally have to do is scrimmage. What you have to do because it is a collective sport, a collective enterprise, is run the various plays or capabilities of the organization, in as realistic an environment until you get very proficient."

And leader development is the key to these combat scrimmages.

"It's sort of like saying you've got a quarterback that comes off the bench and can't read the defenses," Cone said. "You've got a captain, lieutenant, lieutenant colonel who is out there, who's got to make the critical reads on the battlefield. So we do that in a training environment so they get a lot of repetition."

Since live is the most expensive way to drill, many soldiers can expect to hone decision-making skills and mission control in virtual, constructive and gaming exercises.

"It will never replace the real environment, but ... it is not a tough sell when you talk to first-generation digital natives who basically play these massive multiplayer, online games and understand what you really can achieve in ... the decision-making aspects." □